



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OPERATING PROCEDURES MANUAL		
CHAPTER 231	CANINE UNIT OPERATIONS	
	Effective: 7/25/2023	Commissioner Approval: 
	Authorities: AS 11.81.370(a) ; AS 11.56.705-710	
	Applicability: Choose an item.	
	Special Instructions: SEE OPM 107	

231.100 INTRODUCTION

This policy establishes the purpose and protocol of a canine unit.

231.300 CANINE UNIT SUPERVISION

- A. *Canine teams under detachment supervision.*** Each canine team will be under the supervision of the immediate shift supervisor and responsible through the chain-of-command to the Commander responsible for the canine team's geographic assignment.
- B. *Canine teams also report to the Statewide Canine Coordinator.*** In all matters pertaining specifically to the canine, such as use, training, and record keeping the canine team will be responsible to the Statewide Canine Coordinator.

In the event the Statewide Canine Coordinator will be unavailable, they will designate another individual who will act in their absence.

In the event the Statewide Canine Coordinator and their designee are unavailable, the canine teams will report to the senior canine unit currently working within the Alaska State Troopers.

231.310 CANINE UNIT POSITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

- A. *Statewide Canine Coordinator.*** A supervisor preferably with canine experience that coordinates equipment evaluation, repair, and replacement for handlers and canines; compiles canine unit statistics; acts as an advisor on the best use of canines; and maintains canines and handler training and evaluation records.
- B. *Lead Canine Trainer/Instructor.*** An Alaska State Trooper or certified police officer qualified through training and experience by the AST K-9 Unit and certified by Alaska Police Standard Council to train State Troopers or police officers as canine handlers, and dogs as police canines. A Lead Canine Trainer will be designated by the Statewide Canine Coordinator.
- C. *Assistant Canine Trainer/Instructor.*** An Alaska State Trooper or certified police officer qualified through training and experience by the AST K-9 Unit and certified by the Alaska Police Standard Council to train State Troopers or police officers. Assistant Canine Trainers will conduct training for the canine unit under the direction of the Lead Canine Trainer, assist in preparing training seminars, and act as the training instructor in their absence.
- D. *Canine Instructor.*** An Alaska State Trooper or certified police officer qualified through training and experience by the AST K-9 Unit and certified by the Alaska Police Standards Council to train State Troopers or police officers.

E. *Canine Handler.* An Alaska State Trooper or certified police officer qualified through training and certified by the Alaska State Troopers or a DPS recognized canine training program to handle a police canine.

Canine handlers are responsible for carrying out all regular duties of their rank as well as the responsibilities listed in the Alaska Department of Public Safety [Canine Program Manual](#).

The Alaska Department of Public Safety [Canine Program Manual](#) contains the extended list of responsibilities for each position in the canine program.

231.320 HANDLER APPLICATIONS AND SELECTION

A. *Canine Handler qualifications.* An Alaska State Trooper wishing to become a canine handler shall meet the following qualifications.

1. Permanent status as an Alaska State Trooper.
2. Receive their supervisor's recommendation regarding the applicants' temperament, attitude, personality, use of force history, and high stress performance.
3. Receive a minimum overall performance evaluation of mid-acceptable or higher for the preceding rating period.
4. Have demonstrated the ability to work effectively without close supervision.
5. Availability for callouts, travel, and unscheduled work hours.
6. Have family members in full agreement on the assignment to the canine unit.
7. Maintain a residence providing an area, which affords the canine uninterrupted solitude during off shift hours.
8. Agree to at least three years of assignment as a canine handler, excluding promotion, transfer or mutual agreement with the department and canine handler.
9. Ensure that any other pets at home will not interfere with the canine and its training program.
10. Be a successful applicant of the Canine Handler Selection Process
11. Successfully complete canine training for certification.
12. Dual-purpose handlers must maintain an 80% or better on the Department of Public Safety physical fitness testing.
13. Single purpose scent detection handlers must maintain a 70% or better on the Department of Public Safety physical fitness testing.

B. *Application procedure - Canine Handler.*

See [Canine Program Manual](#) and Canine Handler Selection Process.

C. *Applicant selection procedure.* Selection of officers as Canine Handlers will be made as follows.

See [Canine Program Manual](#) and Canine Handler Selection Process.

231.330 GENERAL CANINE CARE/USE RULES

A. *Decision to use canine rests with handler.* The decision as to where and how to apply the canine rests solely with the canine handler. Consequently, each canine handler must know their team's limitations and the constraints imposed by federal and state law, regulations, departmental policies, and canine unit guidelines. (See DPS [Canine Program Manual](#) for Deployment Guidelines.)

B. *Rules for handling police canines.* The following rules apply to the handling of police canines both on and off duty:

1. Outside of supervised canine training only the team handler shall handle the assigned canine unless they are physically unable to;
2. While at the handler's residence, the canine shall either be under the handler's direct control or safely contained;
3. Handlers of canines shall properly maintain all required logs and records in OARS;
4. Handlers will ensure that his/her assigned canine receives timely and proper medical care/vaccinations at a veterinarian center approved by the department for the purpose;
5. Handlers shall maintain their canine in a clean, well-groomed, healthy state of readiness. Reasonable efforts shall be made to minimize objectionable odors. Toward that end:
 - a. The yard/kennel shall be kept sanitary;
 - b. An ill or injured dog shall be reported to the handlers shift supervisor and the Statewide Canine Coordinator. If the canine will be out of service for longer than one week, the Detachment Commander will be notified;
 - c. If the canine unit approved veterinarian, Training Coordinator, or Statewide Canine Coordinator deems the dog temporarily unfit for duty, the handler shall perform normal assigned duties on the current shift assigned, unless otherwise directed by their immediate supervisor.
6. No agitation or apprehension work is to be viewed by the public (nor is the photography of such work permitted) unless specifically authorized in writing by the Statewide Canine Coordinator with approval of the Division Director; and
7. All training, especially agitation work will be conducted under the guidance of the Lead Canine Instructor or designee.

C. *Handlers responsible for protection of others from canine.* Handlers shall take reasonable precautions to see that their canine does not present a hazard to other employees or to members of the public. They shall restrain or muzzle the canine as necessary to prevent unnecessary injury to persons.

D. *Canine bites.*

1. In the event that a police canine is involved in any bite (including accidental), the handler shall immediately report the incident to the Commander and the Statewide Canine Coordinator.
2. The initial report shall be followed by written documentation as follows:

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- a. Complete a Use of Force report using the DPS intranet online reporting system [BlueTeam](#);
 - b. Complete a Canine Application form in OARS and forward it to the Statewide Canine Coordinator within 24 hours;
 - c. Prepare a supplemental report with the original case number. This supplemental report shall contain all of the handler's observations and actions, and shall specifically address canine announcements or warnings given and subsequent suspect actions or responses;
 - d. Photograph the injury, apprehension scene, suspect clothing, etc;
 - e. Note if the hospital has drawn blood from the suspect bitten;
 - f. Save dispatch and/or radio traffic tape recordings, as appropriate; and,
 - g. Conduct a "civil interview" (no Miranda) of the suspect, preferably by a DPS canine handler (current or previous handler) other than the handler involved in the incident. This interview shall be limited in scope to the actual canine bite and suspect's recollection of canine warnings, etc.
3. A copy of the bite documentation (including photos and interview tapes) prepared in compliance with paragraph D2 shall be added to the [BlueTeam](#) report and forwarded to the Statewide Canine Coordinator as a "Civil Bite Package" to be retained in the canine unit files.
 4. The "Civil Bite Package" will be retained by the Statewide Canine Coordinator through Blue Team for a minimum of three years from the date of the incident. If the involved person was a juvenile at the time of the bite, the "Civilian Bite Package" will be retained for a length of time to be determined by the Attorney General's Office.
 5. The Statewide Canine Coordinator will make appropriate notification to the Director's Office, including conclusions regarding the bite and any training issues or recommendations that arose from the incident.

231.340 USE FOR SERVICE (PSD I OR PSD I/II)

A. When police service dogs can be used. The canine handler will apply a canine using due care based on the nature of the offense or call, action of the suspect, time of day or night, presence or action of third parties, and other information available to the officer. Police service dogs may be applied in any of the situations listed below provided that at no time is innocent persons unreasonably endangered.

1. When and to the extent the canine handler believes it necessary to make an arrest, to terminate an escape or attempted escape from custody, or to make a lawful stop. (AS 11.81.370 (a))
2. Tracking a missing or lost person.
3. Assisting in a search for physical evidence.
4. Protection of the handler, other officers, or the canine.

B. *Application of canine is a use of force.* The application of a police service dog, as an instrument of force falls under the provisions of OPM Chapter 107. Each use of a police service dog must be documented in a police report and a "Use of Force Report" must be submitted.

C. *Use of canine off lead.* Off lead application of a police service dog is authorized except in riot / crowd control situations. Due care shall be taken by the handler while working the canine off lead.

D. *Use of Police Service Dog (PSD I or PSD I/II).*

1. When conducting building searches, tracking and area searches handlers will comply with canine unit guidelines for these applications.
2. When using a police service dog the handler should use reasonable restraint and good judgment.
3. Prior to the release of a canine to apprehend, the handler must take every prudent step to ensure the person to be apprehended is the suspect. The handler shall, if tactically feasible, verbally warn the suspect that the canine will be released.
4. In the case where a canine is sent to apprehend, the handler shall attempt to identify any witnesses to the event.
5. Each application of a canine used to search for a person, suspect, or article, shall be documented on a Canine Application Form.

E. *Riot control.*

1. No police service dog will be used for riot control without the knowledge and authorization of the Commander. Canines will remain away from the riot until such authorization is received. The Director or their designee shall be notified of such application as soon as practical.
2. Police service dogs may be used in conjunction with riot formations but shall remain on lead during such deployment. The handler will advise the on-scene commander of the best tactical deployment of the canine.

231.350 USE FOR DETECTION (PSD II OR PSD I/II)

A. *When police service dogs can be used.* Police service dogs may be used to conduct consent searches, searches incident to arrest, searches pursuant to search warrant, or searches in exigent circumstances. Searches may be conducted of buildings (both commercial and residential), vehicles (cars, trucks, watercraft, or aircraft), fields and areas, baggage, mail, parcels, and any other search that the officer has legal authority to search.

B. *Applying the service dog in searches.* When the service dog handler is called to a scene to conduct a search, the handler will contact the on-scene officer and evaluate the type and legality of the requested search; evaluate the search for potential hazards, wind/air currents; and plan the search and brief officers at the scene as to what their conduct or actions shall be and inform them of the canine team's requirements.

- C. *Use of service dog off lead.*** Off lead application of police service dogs is authorized. Due care shall be taken by the handler while working the canine off lead to protect the canine and all persons.
- D. *Use of police service dog training aids.*** The following rules apply to the handling of police service dogs both on and off duty.
1. All narcotics training aids shall be safely cared for and properly documented and disposed of in accordance with the SDEU SOP 231.800 regarding Canine Training Aids.
 2. In the event that a training aid is damaged and some, or all, of the source is lost or destroyed, the handler will write a report and file it to the original case, listing any witnesses to the event in the report, and notifying the Training Coordinator and supervisor as soon as practical.
 3. In the event that a service dog ingests a training source that is toxic, the handler shall take immediate first aid steps and transport to the department approved veterinarian or veterinary emergency facility. The handler shall contact the Statewide Canine Coordinator and supervisor as soon as possible after such an incident.
- E. *Use of police service dog to be documented.*** Any use of a service dog to locate narcotic source shall be documented on a Canine Application Form in OARS.

231.360 TRAINING

- A. *All training will be under Department supervision.*** All training of canines or handlers shall be conducted under the guidance of the Statewide Canine Coordinator.
- B. *Quarterly training.*** Once every three (3) months each canine team will participate in a quarterly training session of duration to be determined by the Statewide Canine Coordinator. The duration of this training session will be based on the training needs of individual teams as well as the needs of the Canine Unit as a whole.
- C. *Maintenance training.*** Handlers will conduct appropriate daily maintenance in obedience and scent work. PSD I/II teams will specifically conduct daily training and reinforcement of the obedience portion of the "Stand Still" command. All canine teams are expected to perform no less than -4 hours per week or 16 hours per month of combined maintenance training.
- D. *Apprehension Training.***
1. Handlers of PSD I/II may conduct apprehension training. This training will only be conducted with an agitator who is properly trained, and who has been approved to participate in training by the Statewide Canine Coordinator.
 2. After each session where apprehension training is conducted, the handler will fill out the appropriate Training Evaluation Form in OARS and immediately forward it to the Canine Coordinator.
 3. In the event a handler encounters an apprehension training issue that they are unable to successfully solve, or one that falls outside the scope of their training as a

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handler, they will immediately stop the training session and contact the Canine Coordinator or a DPS Canine Instructor for instructions.

E. *Special training.* If it is determined that additional training is needed to correct an identified problem, to improve overall performance, or to introduce new skills/material to a canine team, provisions will be made for such training. Special training under this paragraph will be arranged through the Statewide Canine Coordinator.

231.370 CERTIFICATION OF POLICE CANINES

A. *Annual certification required.* The police canine and the handler are required to be certified by a Canine Instructor at least once each year.

B. *Decertification of police canines.* If a police canine fails to certify to at least the minimum level in its specialty, the canine may be removed from the active-duty list and placed into remedial training until the canine can recertify. If the canine fails to certify it may be tested for other specialties or it may be removed from the canine unit.

231.380 CERTIFICATION OF CANINE HANDLERS

A. *Annual certification of handlers required.* Certification of handlers will coincide with the annual certification of their canines. The handler will be evaluated during the certification period and must receive an acceptable score to earn or retain certification.

B. *Decertification of canine handlers.* In the event that a handler fails to obtain a satisfactory score during the certification period, they will be removed from the active-duty list and placed in remedial training. If after remedial training the handler fails to achieve a passing score, the Commander and the Statewide Canine Coordinator may decide on additional training or assign the officer to a non-canine assignment.

231.390 SPECIAL HANDLING PROTOCOL

A. *Public appearances and demonstrations.*

1. All public demonstrations must have the prior approval of the Statewide Canine Coordinator.
2. Canine teams giving demonstrations shall prepare and perform in a professional manner, reflecting favorably on the Alaska State Troopers.
3. Demonstrations shall be given in on-duty uniform for PSC or appropriate dress for PDC. Appearance shall be neat and clean.

B. *Outside agency assists.* The Alaska State Troopers recognizes that outside agencies may occasionally have need for the use of the canine.

1. Requests for assistance of a canine team from an outside agency will be referred to the Commander or their designee for approval.
2. If a Commander is not available, the supervisor on duty will be contacted and advised of the request and they will make a determination for approval.

C. *Canine units' assignment to calls.* Canine units, whenever possible, will not be dispatched as the primary case officer to traffic accidents or other calls involving lengthy investigations unless necessary due to a shortage of other officers. This will allow the Canine Unit to be available to back-up other officers and perform canine activity. However, handlers must be mindful that they are Troopers first and handlers second.

D. *Officer's conduct around canines.* Troopers shall familiarize themselves with the canine's abilities to track and search. However:

1. Troopers shall not "horse" or "grab" around canines.
2. Troopers shall not get into K-9 vehicles unless directed to do so by the handler.

E. *Assault on Police Canine / Harming or Harassing a Police Canine.* Intentionally injuring or harassing a police canine is a crime. If an Alaska State Troopers canine is injured, the suspect shall be charged under the appropriate state statute.

1. Harming a Police Dog in the First Degree. (AS 11.56.705, C Felony) Intentionally kills/causes harm to a dog known to be a police dog.
2. Harming a Police Dog in the Second Degree. (AS 11.56.710, A Misdemeanor) Intentionally injures, torments, kicks, or strikes a dog they know to be a police dog.

F. *Authorized vacation kennel facilities.* Kenneling of canines during handler vacations and other leave is available through a department approved facility or a current DPS employee who is a previous DPS canine handler authorized by the Statewide Canine Coordinator to temporarily kennel a DPS canine.

231.400 HANDLER'S EQUIPMENT

A. *Equipment issued to handlers.* Each handler will be issued the following:

1. Portable radio,
2. Cell Phone;
3. Leads in the lengths of 3.5', 15', and 30';
4. Leather muzzle (agitation style);
5. Choke chain (fur saver);
6. Food/water dishes;
7. 15' training cable;
8. Grooming brushes;
9. Toys, balls, detection training aids (if applicable);
10. "Pooper scooper"; and
11. One chain link run at least 5 x 6 x 15 foot.

B. *Canine identification.* Each canine shall be photographed and issued a State identification card identifying it as an Alaska State Troopers Canine.

C. *Authorized supplies.* Food and minor supplies may be obtained from the approved supplier or the department approved veterinarian.

D. *K-9 vehicles.*

1. Patrol K-9 Unit vehicles will be marked uniformly and in a manner that safely identifies the vehicle as containing a police service canine. The rear seat will be removed and a platform for a container will be installed to provide a safe area for the canine.
2. Detector K-9 Unit vehicles may either be marked or unmarked; whichever fits the unit's mission. The interior needs to be altered to provide a safe area for the dog.
3. Vehicles assigned to tracking canines will be equipped for extended field stays (2-day tracks).

231.410 INSIGNIA

A. *Establishment of K9 insignia.* The canine unit insignia shall be the letter “K” and number “9” 11/16” wide by 7/16” high with the small AST badge centered between the characters.

B. *Canine unit troopers authorized to wear insignia.* Upon successful completion of a basic canine academy and certification as a canine handler, members of the canine unit will be authorized to wear the insignia as set out in OPM Chapter 102.

231.420 RETIREMENT OF CANINES

A. *Canines retired by Statewide Canine Coordinator.* Canines will be retired on the recommendation of the Statewide Canine Coordinator, the department approved veterinarian, the Commander and the Director.

B. *Canine may be transferred to last handler.* When it becomes necessary to retire a canine from active duty, the department may transfer ownership of the animal to the last handler.

C. *Contract required of person accepting retired canine.* A contract releasing the State of Alaska, the Alaska State Troopers, the canine unit and its personnel from all liability must be signed by a Commander and the person taking possession of a retired canine.

D. *Other disposition of retired canines.* Should the last handler decline to accept the dog, the Statewide Canine Coordinator shall attempt placement in an appropriate home. If the animal is unable to be placed in a proper home, the Statewide Canine Coordinator may place the animal in an animal control center for a short period of time in an attempt to locate an adoptive home. If placement of the retired canine is impractical, the department approved veterinarian will euthanize the canine.

231.430 DEATH OF A POLICE CANINE

A. *Notification of death required.* In the event of the death of a department canine the handler will immediately contact the Commander and the Statewide Canine Coordinator.

- B. *Death of Department canine to be investigated.*** The Detachment Commander will conduct an investigation of the incident separate from any possible pending criminal case. They may call upon the Statewide Canine Coordinator for assistance as required.
- C. *Necropsy may be conducted.*** If the Statewide Canine Coordinator decides a necropsy is necessary the department approved veterinarian will conduct it. The postmortem report will be filed in the canine's training files.
- D. *Detachment will investigate criminal allegations.*** If the death was the result of criminal activity, the Commander shall initiate an investigation.
- E. *Investigation will be forwarded to Director.*** The Statewide Canine Coordinator will forward the results of the investigation to the Director.
- F. *Cremation and burial authorized by Canine Coordinator.*** The Statewide Canine Coordinator will authorize cremation and burial arrangements.

231.900 DEFINITIONS

Application – The use of a police canine in any police related function.

Canine Team – One handler with an assigned canine. Both handler and canine having been certified and issued full equipment (i.e. full team prepared to perform assigned duty).

Canine Vehicle -- A vehicle specifically prepared to provide safety and transportation for canine team.

Handler -- A certified Alaska State Trooper assigned to the canine unit who has successfully completed the required training and has been certified as a canine handler.

K-9 – Canine/police dog.

Off Lead -- A condition where a canine is under the verbal and/or hand signal control of the assigned handler.

On Lead -- A condition where a canine is attached to and controlled by a lead in the hand(s) of a canine handler.

Police Service Dog I (PSD I) – A canine assigned to the canine unit trained and certified in basic tracking, area searches, building searches, apprehension techniques, obedience and handler protection.

Police Service Dog I/II (PSD I/II) – A canine assigned to the canine unit trained and certified to at least the level of a PSD I and is trained and certified in additional scent work or special operations (e.g. narcotics, explosives or cadaver detection; advanced tracking; accelerant detection; evidence detection; or SERT operations).

Police Service Dog II (PSD II) – A canine assigned to the canine unit trained and certified in the detection of three or more sources/odors solely in narcotics detection.